

3: Kabbadias

EH14 Sarakatsani EH14

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[For information on "magical thinking", see Category 811.]

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These last observations complete this general survey of the magic practices of our herders and their historico-cultural origins.

Though the pages we have devoted to them do not exhaust the subject--the choice of the more significant facts constituting the requirement /286/ for every work of this kind--it seems to us that the picture drawn is sufficiently rich to permit us to push our analysis forward toward new problems.

THE MAGICAL THINKING OF THE SARAKATSANI

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What is the specific /type of/ thought that defines and justifies the magic practices and rites of the Sarakatsani? That is the new problem which we shall attack within the context of this study whose chief concern is anthropological.

If studied from the outside, this thinking proves to be entirely oriented toward action, leading toward the end to be reached. It takes into consideration only the methods handed down by tradition, without ever questioning their effectiveness, whether the desired effects are obtained or not. In this thinking, means and effects are not bound together by a rational type of judgment, but are joined together in belief.

However, this definition is very general and, on that account, applicable to all kinds of magic. We must therefore seek to formulate another /definition/, more subtle, hence more representative of the characteristics of the magic of these herders.

(124)

In this matter we were unable to count on the possible aid of our informants. Those who practice magic never ask themselves about the thought underlying it. Thus we find ourselves obliged to proceed by inference and to conduct our research from materials included in the foregoing title /section/. We can pin-point its stages in relation to the following reflections:

If it is true that in order to "recognize" a thought we must retain the ideas in which it is expressed, it will be necessary, in order to recapture

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121 Sarakatsani magical thinking, to try to keep the ideas that emanate
789 from it apart from the phenomena in which these ideas manifest the-
153 selves.

We shall therefore start by determining the fundamental ideas governing both the magic action and the means put at its disposal. There is here a static aspect which, as such, offers to our eyes only a limited view of our problem. In order to broaden it, its transposition to a dynamic perspective seems indispensable. We shall therefore examine under what conditions magic and the corresponding ideas are born, what is /287/ the process of their formation, what is the totality of ideas that accompanies their application.

That is not all. It is also necessary to see what the Sarakatsani idea is concerning their magic. We shall rediscover it included in their attitude toward magic. Then, by using the conclusions drawn from these observations, we shall proceed to an attempt to define the magic thought.

Finally, we shall compare magic thought and non-magic thought in order to emphasize the characteristics and the structure of the former, and we shall conclude with some critical reflections bearing on our interpretations and our conclusions.

The Postulates that Make Possible Magic Action.

The magical thought of the Sarakatsani puts forward certain fundamental ideas, true postulates, which serve as points of departure and a basis for magical action. We shall enumerate them:

The postulate of transmissibility. This is the conviction that virtues, qualities, characteristics, functions, etc., existing in the forces ruling the universe or in certain definite objects can be transmitted to men or to beasts if they /the latter/ are put in contact with these forces or these objects.

The postulate of the opposition of forces. In order to defend his person and his goods against threats arising from various sources

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121 (supernatural beings, hidden evils, evil eye, etc.), man can oppose
789 them with forces in his favor. The result is a mutual neutralization
153 of opposite influences which permits men and animals to keep safe from
evil.

The postulate that forces will not destroy themselves. The fact that a person is a harmful force, or rather its symbol on themselves, suffices to hinder the latter from releasing its baneful influence: it cannot act against itself.

The postulate of simple removal. The evils, represented anthropomorphically, can be forced to remove themselves if one attacks their supposed senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, etc.) in a disagreeable fashion.

The postulate of purification. If, despite the precautions taken, man or beast are attacked by magic influences, they are at the very least contaminated. A purification is /288/ possible by means of favorable forces which neutralize the contamination by exerting an opposing influence on it.

Finally, the postulate of representation of desired situations and effects desired. Sometimes, all that is needed in order to cause a situation or obtain a desired effect, is to represent them in one way or another, by gestures, words or dramatic scenes. In this case the representation is as good as the reality.

This postulate is connected, up to a certain point, with the conviction that man, in certain circumstances, is in a position to set in motion for his benefit the forces ruling the universe.

The most important of these postulates (98)

98. A certain number of examples illustrating them will be found below, p. 290.

is that of transmissibility, not because it is found in most of the rites and practices, but because it is one of the assumptions underlying the

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121 others--an assumption that is both ontological and operational.
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153 A governing idea comes to light behind these postulates and serves as their foundation: a desired result can be obtained if man, the livestock and their lives are brought into relationship with an appropriate agent--the source of a favorable influence. The magic operation thus involves two components that are placed in association.

Which leads to a new question: How is this association brought about? Two more postulates furnish the solution:

1. Contact. The components of the magic action are placed either in direct contact or in mediated contact. In the second instance one of the elements of the action--and at that moment it is a matter of a cosmic force or a qualitative reality, hence arbitrary--is represented by a symbol or a sign serving as mediator.

It is interesting to note that often an object is chosen as a symbol which itself has a relationship, obviously assumed, with the force it represents, so that the latter will have transmitted to that object some of its properties. Thus the symbol in question has a double efficacy. It becomes a means of contact both indirect (as a symbol) and direct (because of the properties which have been transmitted to it.) That is the case, for example, with the blood of the woman in childbirth on the lips of the child, it symbolizes the creative forces and at the same time has properties of its own since it has already been in contact with the creative forces. In this case we may speak of a mixed contact.

(826)
(844) /289/ 2. Representation. The association is sometimes brought about by simple representation. Instead of being brought about materially, the contact is represented. This is the equivalent if not the corollary of the postulate of the representation of situations, but the two things must not be confused. In the postulate, the representation produces the final effect. When the representation is a means of association, the contact is simply imitated without going further.

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This kind of association also includes the juxtaposition in space of the two components of the magic action.

CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH MAGIC IS CALLED UPON TO INTERVENE.

We may distinguish four categories:

- a) Psychological: the Sarakatsani must cope with problems of urgent necessity. In most cases the issues are vital.
- b) Cultural: Sarakatsani knowledge and technology are incapable of solving these problems.
- c) Social: it is Sarakatsani society, in large part, that defines the needs and makes them urgent. Furthermore, the social framework hampers the development of knowledge and technology. Thus it thwarts, albeit indirectly, the rational solution of problems.
- d) "Human": man, like all the other species, must act upon his environment in order to survive. Magic is a means of dominating the world through the action that it inspires.

Two conclusions are to be drawn from this classification:

- a) Each of the conditions enumerated above may be isolated from the others only abstractly, which means that in reality all four make up an indissoluble whole.
- b) These conditions are reduced in practice to strong motivations, at once intellectual, affective, socio-cultural and even instinctive (it is self-preservation which, basically, is involved), which set in motion the magical thinking and constitute an atmosphere favorable to its development.

It would therefore be erroneous to assert, as has been done on several occasions, that magic, as thought or as action, is based solely on man's fear and anguish before the unknown and the mysterious, on the thought of his weakness in the face of entities /290/ that are beyond him. Reality demands that we approach the study of magic on the basis of all the phenomena that underly it, in other words, in a multidimensional manner.

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THE PROBLEM OF THE FORMULATION OF POSTULATES AND MEANS OF ACTION.

The postulates as well as the means of magical action are based on the observation of the sentient world. Transmissibility, mutual neutralization of opposing forces, non-self-destruction of forces, withdrawal from the painful and disagreeable are phenomena derived from the everyday /experience/.

Man, through his own experience of heat transmission from a warm body to a cold body, of the contagiousness of diseases, of putrefaction of organic matter placed near matter already decomposed, readily concludes that contact with an object possessing a desired property of quality is a sufficient means of acquiring it. (99)

99. This same ideas is also found in H. Webster:

La magie "the magician is incapable of distinguishing the category of resemblance from that of identity...

It is an axiom of magic that imagination is the equivalent or reality: Ficta pro veris accipi,"

p. 71.--However, Webster does not see that if the magician does not make the distinction between resemblance and identity, the reason is not a logical incapacity, but psycho-sociological factors, as we shall see later on.

Similarly, he concludes in favor of other postulates from analogous facts. If two men push a rock from opposite sides and they are equally strong, the rock will not roll. If a person wants to pass through a hedge of thorny shrubs, the thorns will make him turn back. And it is contrary to all probability to suppose that a source of any influence, especially when basically it is anthropomorphically conceived, can act against itself and in such a way as to destroy itself.

Thus, by deduction, man arrives at the two principal ideas of all magic, that of transmissibility, on the one hand, and that of the effectiveness of contact, on the other, and consequently /he arrives/ at all the others.

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At the base of all this may be seen an activity of the mind developing from analogical reasoning, which makes possible the deductions in question.

Nevertheless, how can one not ask oneself what impels the Sarakatsani to accept and apply practices supported only by analogical reasoning, not objectively /291/ verifiable? It is all the more impossible to escape this question since these herders have enough critical and rational mentality, as their technology and their social organization show, to test the efficacy of the procedures based on the ideas expressed above. Thus, the failure to verify postulates and procedures shows that in the process of their formation other factors intervene which make them a subject of general belief. It is not the established value of the analogical reasoning which imposes the postulates and the methods of action. It is the dynamics of these other elements which force their acceptance.

We are therefore faced with one of the most delicate problems of Sarakatsani magic which we must clarify before proceeding further. We believe the way to solve it is through the following hypotheses.

Everything may begin by chance. A coincidence, a combination of circumstances or some result taking place in the presence of two components, actually or presumably related, suffices for the relationship to be considered the cause of the effect.

It may likewise be supposed that man, under the emotional impetus arising from the need to face a problem for him and those around him that is serious and otherwise insoluble may decide to act by analogical reasoning. If a certain effect is produced, though it be illusory, or, what amounts to the same thing, if other factors intervene which, rightly or wrongly, seem to hinder the realization of the desired result, he will be led to believe that his procedure is effective.

In the third place, it is probable that a simple hypothesis based on analogical reasoning related to a treatment or any curative goal and

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121 put forward in a doubtful manner is assumed by an interlocutor, finding
789 himself in conditions favoring this type of reasoning, to be a
153 prescription or a method of action to be followed.

These examples, which could be multiplied, may give an inkling of how the nucleus of a future conviction originates.

Once this method is established, the collective consciousness of the group in which this phenomenon develops will pass judgment on it; it will accept it or reject it. But if /the method/ is accepted, the group will give it its prestige, its authority over individual consciousness, and will sacralize it.

/292/ Furthermore, duration, time will add its own confirmation. The comments, the narration, the repetition, will enrich the initial idea. In view of the fact that the beginnings of the initial experience are rooted in the past, manipulation will draw from it increased prestige. And insofar as technical or cognitive progress do not disturb it, the belief in its effectiveness will remain alive.

121 Obviously, all this is merely hypothesis, not diachronically verifiable since ethnographic observation has no way of studying traditional phenomena at the time they are born. Nevertheless, it seems to us that these hypotheses are governed by certain phenomena of an analogous order, which are produced in our societies and of which we herewith give a brief description.

First, analogical reasoning in connection with curative phenomena is not foreign to our "civilized" mentality. Some examples drawn from recent experience show this in a striking manner.

The introduction of antibiotics in the therapy of certain scientifically defined diseases was immediately followed by their immoderate use for everything, even for simple ailments for which they are not effective. The beneficial action of novocaine on arthritic pains of old people has led to the conviction that this medicine combats old age. At one time (100)

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103. On the relations of this myth which might be called a "social myth (through all myths are social) to the cosmological myth see below Chapter VIII.

/294/ This said, we must ask ourselves whether actually this parallel between the mechanism of the formation of "analogical" curative procedures observed in our societies and that of magical procedures of traditional societies is a fortunate parallel, and also whether our conclusions with regard to the first can be applied to the second, in view of the difference that exists between these societies.

We believe that the reply is affirmative:

Contemporary instances of analogical curing and the procedures of traditional white magic are called upon to serve the same needs. They originate under the same objective conditions, that is to say, where knowledge cannot intervene. They respond to the same psychological needs of security and deliverance from the anguish in the face of the unknown; therefore they manifest themselves in a climate which does not favor a distinction between the wished-for and the real.

Finally, the influence that society exerts is the same in both cases. The expectation of a solution in the past of the group as well as individuals comes before every creative event of practice and conviction. And at the moment this event takes place the channels of its diffusion--individuals, sub-groups, groups, etc.--are the same; they are called upon to take part in it and they actually do so, determining the same results.

Therefore, the inference from synchronic phenomena to diachronic phenomena is not arbitrary, and does not constitute a

* παρατήρησις: ἡ ἀλλοτρίωσις. Our hypotheses are legitimate and it seems to us that they do not distort reality. Consequently, we may definitively conclude that: 1st, both the postulates and the means of Sarakatsani magical action are based on analogical reasoning.--2nd, this reasoning born under

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[153] the pressure of necessity and in an emotional climate that springs from it, then is acted on by the dynamics of Sarakatsani society by way of a mechanism very close to--if not identical with--that of the creation of rumors.--3rd, finally owing to these conditions, it /this reasoning/ is transformed into patterns of action--objects of an unshakable belief from which it derives its validity and the reason for its existence. It then becomes myth which, while summoned to action and repetition, has no need for a foundation other than its own character of myth, since myth is never accompanied by doubt.

/295/ Nevertheless, we have not yet shown how two phenomena came about. These are, on the one hand, the postulate of the representation of situations and desired effects and, on the other, the represented contact.

121 Now, the acceptance of this postulate and this type of contact implies
153 once again the use of analogical reasoning.

189 If an effect is produced by bringing into contact two already existing components, why should not another effect be produced by bringing into relation one component (man or animal) with the representation of a situation or a desired reality?

Likewise, if material contact permits transmission and other effects, resulting from it why does contact merely represented not allow this?

The fact that the second component of the magical action as well as the means of action are merely symbolized in the representation is not a sufficient reason to consider this postulate and this means as qualitatively different from others. The relationship between symbol and thing symbolized is so intimate that finally symbol and thing symbolized become identified.

121 Thus we see that the process by which the postulate and the magical
189 means in question were formed cannot differ from that which has been accepted in connection with other postulates and means, despite the

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121 have nothing unusual about them if we consider the phenomena which it
789 aims at and the lack of other means of influencing them.

121 Simple transmission presupposes a knowledge of the outside world
82 based on perception and observation, and even on common sense. Obviously,
789 this knowledge does not always correspond to scientific facts, but one cannot, for all that, deny its existence. It is this same knowledge that has given rise to the formation of the postulate of transmissibility and which here determines the content and orientation of the corresponding practices. Thanks to it the Sarakatsani succeeds in grasping the qualities and properties of different objects, qualities and properties which he lacks and of which he has need; finally, it is this knowledge that permits him to symbolize some desirable effects by means of the properties in question. This process is likewise bound up with
● (153) analogical reasoning.

Myth does not occupy a place in the framework of simple transmission as such. However, it promotes /299/ the effectiveness of the latter, as we have shown in the preceding paragraph.

These two types of action--mythical transmission and simple transmission--inspired by the postulate of transmissibility, as well as the ideas underlying them are not opposed to each other but are complementary. The ideas refer to two aspects of the world which ultimately become one. And these two kinds of action become integrated in a single process of which they represent two complementary aspects. At the point where the practices defined by myth reach their limit, the practices inspired by knowledge and analogous reasoning enter the scene to complete the work of the first ones. The ultimate goal is man and his life.

On the other hand, observation of transmission practices shows--and we must emphasize this particularly--that the components of the action which are brought into contact present a homogeneity of qualities. There is a correspondence between the property, the quality, etc., which one

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121 wishes to acquire and the virtues of the different objects with which
82 one puts oneself in contact in order to satisfy this desire. The
989 strength of iron and the skull ensure the strength of the living being.
The sweetness of honey /ensures/ the sweetness of life. The multitude
of seeds, the multitude of products. The male child, the birth of boys,
etc. In this correspondence we see that quantity calls forth quantity,
quality /calls forth/ quality, the abstract and the symbolic /call
forth/ abstraction and symbolism, the functional /calls forth/ the
functional. However, and this deserves to be emphasized very specially,
this homogeneity of qualities points to a classifications of reality made
by the Sarakatsani themselves. There is no need to try to justify them
scientifically. The fact that these classifications exist is very
significant. Equally significant is the fact that the magical action is
possible only within the same category of the real.

121 Shifts from one type of quality to another come about only within the
989 limits of symbolism, a fact which does not deny the homogeneity but
confirms it.

153 Underneath this action we must recognize a thinking both positive and
selective, testifying anew to the existence among the Sarakatsani of
rationality and a knowledge of the world, closely bound up with their
magic.

The application of the processes of contact within the framework of
practices inspired by the postulate of transmissibility /300/ is also
determined by homogeneity. Direct and material contact, on the one hand,
and mediated contact, on the other, are carried out only on the basis of a
choice made in terms of what one seeks to transmit: the mythical and
abstract can be transmitted only through the intermediary of a symbol or a
sign (the moons on the skirt; black, the sign of mourning), for they
represent all of intelligible reality. On the other hand, the transmission
of a concrete property (blood from the paschal lamb on the forehead of

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789 These remarks, though brief, show very well that the magical action
121 of our herders has about it nothing mechanical or constraining. The
forces do not act automatically or obligatorily simply because the magic
practice has been carried out. The wish of man, expressed in his acts,
is evocative but not determining. It seems that the wish represents,
rather, a challenge thrown out to these forces, but without the certainty
that the latter will rise to it. Finally, when the desired effect is
(781) produced the Sarakatsani is dominated by the feeling that something
(794) exceptional has been accomplished, and his soul is filled with wonder and
exaltation.

121 All these states of the soul, a product of mythical ideas put into
789 /303/ magical thought, are bound up indissolubly, actually or potentially,
153 with his thought. This enables us to understand that Sarakatsani magic,
despite the intellectual aspects that we have particularly emphasized, is
not a mechanical or rational magic, but includes components and living
experiences which make it much richer than analogical reasoning or any
other reasoning.

To come back to our problem, the states of the soul as described
constitute for Sarakatsani magical thinking a sort of ambience with
which the latter is suffused, although in actuality they cannot be
separated from it. Seen from the standpoint of structure, this ambience
represents the foundations of all the layers of their magical thinking,
whether the rites involved or those transmission or any others.

121 This means that the rites of simple transmission, too, are
789 accompanied by uncertainty with regard to the achievement of the desired
effect, and by respect and wonder at the result accomplished. Obviously,
these feeling are relatively subdued as compared with those that arise
in connection with other magic practices. One finds here nothing
mechanical, automatic or, coercive that would require the desired property
and quality to be transmitted to man or animals.

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(153) KNOWLEDGE PERTAINING TO THE NATURE AND PHYSIOLOGY OF MEN AND ANIMALS.

This knowledge has its source in the observation of nature and of life, in experience and in reasoning based on common sense. Knowledge thus takes shape which accumulates in the course of time and is transmitted by tradition from one generation to the other.

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114 We are not unaware that, according to certain theorists, technology is not founded on true knowledge, for the "primitive" does not conceptualize reality, and causality /353/ is foreign to him. (2)

2. See G. Davey: Sociologues d'hier..., p. 228 f., presenting theories of L. Lévy-Bruhl: La mentalité primitive pp. 93 and 350-351, who says that technology is intuition and instinct, action for a particular occasion.--D'Espinas: Origines de la technologie, p. 47, asserting that the tool is an extension of the worker's limbs and that he never thinks of its effectiveness.--L. Brunschvicg: L'expérience humaine et la causalité physique, p. 92, proposing that the non-civilized order (hunting, fishing, herding, manufacture) without being able to conclude that this confidence is actually an outcropping of his consciousness.--Goldenweiser: Early civilisation /cited in English/, pp. 406-407 who speaks of an independence of technical progress in relation to intellectual progress. For him, the logic of technology is a logic of nature, unconsciously imposed on the human mind by action.

But none of these theories seems to us acceptable, and not only in the Sarakatsani case, but for all human culture. From the moment man intervenes and acts on matter by transforming it according to his own wishes to useful ends and on the basis of physical properties, it is impossible